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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUBLIN 000362

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TAGS: PGOV PREL EI FUN

SUBJECT: IRISH REFERENDUM ON LISBON TREATY: THE ISSUES AND  
THE PLAYERS

REF: A. DUBLIN 298

¶B. DUBLIN 236

¶C. DUBLIN 220

¶D. DUBLIN 213

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Classified By: DCM Robert J. Faucher. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: After deciding against the EU Lisbon Treaty in a first referendum on June 12, 2008, the Irish will vote on Lisbon again on October 2. With the campaign in full swing, a recent poll gives the "yes" side 46 percent with 29 percent opposed and 25 percent undecided. This represents an 8 point drop in Lisbon support compared to the previous poll in May. The issues essentially boil down to two questions:

(1) whether the EU can be trusted to respect Irish distinctiveness; and (2) whether looser or tighter EU ties will result in a more prosperous and self-determining Ireland. Many in the pro-Lisbon camp claim, perhaps exaggeratedly, that the vote's outcome will be fundamental to Ireland's future, and the idea that a "yes" vote would be a safe vote in a bad economy is proving quite powerful. The "no" side's emphasis on Irish distinctiveness also resonates, but the anti-Lisbon camp -- for the moment -- is largely an uncoordinated gaggle of groups outside the mainstream. END SUMMARY.

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THE ISSUES: WHO DO YOU TRUST?  
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¶2. (C) After the "no" vote in the last referendum, the government went back to its EU partners and received assurances, separate from the Treaty itself, that Lisbon would not call into question Irish prerogatives in the areas deemed most important to voters: Irish military neutrality, taxation, the right to life, education and the family, and the protection of workers' rights. The Irish also received a guarantee that Ireland would continue to have a Commissioner in the European Commission. All these issues -- except for retention of a Commissioner -- remain in debate, however, because most of the anti-Lisbon groups do not believe these guarantees are reliable. Supporters of the Treaty like Dick Roche, Minister of State for European Affairs, say that the guarantees are "iron-clad" and cannot be revoked. Typical of the "no" side's view is what Sinn Fein Vice President Mary Lou McDonald told us: "The so-called guarantees are nothing more than decisions that can be changed at any time. The Treaty itself has not changed one bit."

¶3. (C) Uncertainty about the implications of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union plays an important role in this question of reliability. Previously an EU political declaration of disputed legal status outlining the rights of European citizens and residents, the Charter is now incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty as a legally binding part

of the Treaty. The left-wing,s anti-Lisbon camp believes that the European Court of Justice (ECJ ) the EU,s version of a Supreme Court) will, based on the Charter, rule in future cases involving workers, rights in favor of free movement of low-wage labor regardless of national labor legislation. Michael O'Brien, Socialist Party National Committee member, told Poloff that this would result in legally binding ECJ jurisprudence undermining the rights of Irish workers. From the right wing, the abortion argument of the "no" side is essentially similar; the ECJ could interpret the Charter as enshrining the right to an abortion in EU law, thereby forcing Ireland to legalize abortion.

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THE ESTABLISHMENT UNANIMOUS FOR YES  
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14. (C) A relevant aspect of this campaign is the notable contrast between who is on the "yes" side and who is on the "no" side. The political and economic establishment is lined up virtually unanimously in favor of the Lisbon Treaty. Every major political party, all of the recognized business groups, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions are all actively advocating a "yes" vote. Their message is that full participation in the EU, as symbolized by a "yes" vote on Lisbon, is crucial to the recovery of Ireland,s economy and to Ireland,s political influence as a part of a globally engaged EU. Jill Donoghue, Director General of the Dublin-based Institute of International and European Affairs, summed up this viewpoint well, "an Ireland in Europe is an Ireland in the center of things; an Ireland outside Europe is an isolated island on the periphery."

15. (C) COMMENT: With anti-establishment feelings running high in Ireland right now, in the midst of a contracting economy,

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rising unemployment and with government austerity measures on the horizon, the establishment,s pro-Lisbon unanimity may turn out to be a disadvantage at the ballot box. In a poll this month, support for governing party Fianna Fail fell to 17 percent of respondents, a nearly 60 percent drop from its showing of 42 percent in the May 2007 national elections.  
END COMMENT.

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THE "NO" SIDE,S MISSING CENTER  
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16. (C) Unlike the pro-Lisbon camp, the "no" side lacks not only the personal visibility of mainstream politicians but also, in contrast to the run-up to the first referendum, a figure who can bring together and inspire a larger movement. After failing to win a European Parliament seat in the June elections, the Irish entrepreneur Declan Ganley, the highly effective voice of the anti-Lisbon camp in 2008 and founder of the anti-Lisbon Libertas Party, decided he would not participate in the campaign this time around (refs C and D). This has left the field to anti-Lisbon campaigners who so far are either relatively anonymous or are readily categorized as members of right- or left-wing interest groups. COMMENT: Since a lively anti-Lisbon interview by Ganley published on September 10 in the Wall Street Journal Europe, there is growing speculation that Ganley might join the "no" side campaign after all. Such a development could significantly energize the anti-Lisbon camp. END COMMENT.

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THE LEFT WING OF THE "NO" SIDE  
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17. (C) Most groups on the "no" side this time around approach Lisbon from the left wing, motivated primarily by a desire to protect workers, rights and to safeguard Irish military neutrality (see paras 2 and 3 above). Most prominent in the left-wing anti-Lisbon camp are Sinn Fein, the Socialist Party

and the trade union Unite. But these groups are largely on the fringe of the left wing. Sinn Fein comes in fourth among Irish political parties at best, far behind the two principal parties, and holding only one-fifth the number of Irish parliament seats held by the pro-Lisbon Labour Party. Unlike Sinn Fein, s nearest competitor in terms of percentage of vote, the pro-Lisbon Greens who are currently in the government, Sinn Fein is also without a realistic prospect of participation in a governing coalition. (NOTE: Some Green and Labour party activists oppose Lisbon, but the parties themselves support it. END NOTE.) The other anti-Lisbon party on the Left, the Socialist Party, holds no Irish parliament seats and is represented in the European Parliament by only one MEP. The trade union picture is murkier, with the 60,000-member Unite Trade Union, one of the largest in Ireland, coming out against Lisbon, but SIPTU, the largest trade union, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in the "yes" camp. How rank-and-file union members will vote remains unclear, with no polls focused on union members available.

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THE RIGHT WING OF THE "NO" SIDE  
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¶8. (C) This time around, the only active group on the right wing of the anti-Lisbon camp is COIR, which claims to be a group formed solely to oppose Lisbon, but is widely believed to be made up mainly of Catholic conservatives who believe that Ireland will be forced to legalize abortion because of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, inclusion in the Lisbon Treaty. COIR is waging a noticeable poster campaign, asserting in short, easy-to-remember slogans that Lisbon would mean a lower minimum wage in Ireland, a loss of influence within the EU for Ireland as a small country, and a loss of Irish independence. But our contacts widely share the assessment of Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin, who has publicly accused COIR of being a shadowy "front organization" for a pro-life group that is intentionally distorting the Lisbon debate.

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COMMENT: LACK OF TRUST VS. FEAR OF ISOLATION  
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¶9. (C) As of this writing, neither side in the campaign has clearly sparked momentum toward either possible outcome. The key to the campaign will be to convince the undecided; this pits a currently marginalized, disunited "no" side against a cohesive, middle-of-the-road establishment. Both sides realize that the Irish economy and jobs are foremost in people's minds, not grandiose ideas about the future of

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Europe and Ireland's place in it. With the Central Bank of Ireland predicting Ireland's economy will contract by 8.3 percent in 2009, and unemployment having ballooned to 12.4 percent (and expected to go higher), the government's unpopularity could tip the balance to the "no" side. Alternatively, the establishment's argument that Ireland should not cast itself adrift from the EU during this economic storm could win the day. Underlying all of this is an unspoken conflict between a lack of trust in an opaque EU, and a fear of isolation in bad economic times. END COMMENT.  
FAUCHER